DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 836 CG 019 320

AUTHOR Privette, Gayle
TITLE Implications of Peak Interpersonal Performance for Counseling.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling Objectives; *Counseling Techniques; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Performance
IDENTIFIERS *Peak Performance

ABSTRACT

Peak performance is defined as behavior that surpasses what could be predicted for a person in a particular situation occurring in any type of activity. This study links peak performance as a prototype of human excellence with counseling as a prototypical relationship. It falls within the humanistic tradition, emphasizing the positive instead of the pathological and stressing experience or inner processes instead of behavior. In this study, experiential correlates of peak relationships were examined to identify processes that may be pertinent to counseling. Important inner processes associated with optimal interpersonal functioning were identified from narrative reports and factor analysis of data sets from 14 adult respondents and a factor structure of peak performance reported by 120 adults. The results suggest that peak performance is an independent experiential phenomenon, different from average behavior. Four key inner processes associated with optimal performance in relationships parallel effective counseling practices and include: (1) clear focus on the client's meaning and value; (2) a strong sense of self; (3) spontaneity of process; and (4) the synergistic combination of power and joy. (References and data tables are included). (Author/ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED272836

CG 019320

Implications of Peak Interpersonal Performance for Counseling

Gayle Privette

The University of West Florida

Running head: PEAK INTERPERSONAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gayle Privette

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

The construct "peak performance," identifies a superior level of functioning in any human activity. Important inner processes associated with optimal interpersonal functioning were identified from narrative reports and factor analysis of data sets from 14 adult respondents and a factor structure of peak performance reported by 120 adults. Four key inner processes associated with optimal performance in relationships parallel effective counseling practices and include: (a) clear focus on the client's meaning and value, (b) a strong sense of self, (c) spontaneity of process, and (d) the synergistic combination of power and joy.

Implications of Peak Interpersonal Performance for Counseling

Counseling, most importantly, is a relationship and, as such, presents intriguing yet problematic research questions. One research perspective especially relevant to counseling is the positive-model approach found in the humanistic orientation. Exemplified by Maslow's (1954) self-actualizing people and Rogers' (1977) fully-functioning people, this approach has proved to be heuristic as well as providing personality goals. As a positive-model approach to relationships, Rogers' (1951 & 1962) work on conditions of therapeutic growth has led to a large body of clinical and experimental research, e.g., Bergin & Garfield (1980); Carkhuff (1966); Ivey & Gluckstern (1974).

This study links peak performance as a prototype of human excellence with counseling as a prototypical relationship. It falls within the humanistic tradition, emphasizing the positive instead of the pathological and stressing experience, or inner processes such as cognitions, feelings, meanings, and images, instead of behavior. In this study, experiential correlates of peak relationships were examined to identify processes that may be pertinent to counseling.

The Nature of Peak Performance

Peak performance is defined as behavior that surpasses what could be predicted for a person in a particular situation. It may occur in any type of activity: intellectual, emotional, physical, or interpersonal. Peak performance has been established as an experiential phenomenon germane to optimal human functioning (Privette, 1981, 1982d; Privette

& Landsman, 1983). Further analyses have resulted in tentative descriptions of selected types of peak performance; i.e., death crises, intellectual performance, sports (Privette, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c) and the subject of this paper interpersonal performance.

Peak interpersonal performance may best be understood by reviewing a personal report. A respondent in peak-performance research, an experienced law-enforcement officer and combat veteran, described a time of extending himself emotionally with a stranger.

> I didn't know the victims, but one bloody mess that hardly looked human called to me and, out of what was once a face, appealed for help. He didn't want physical assistance, but some close personal contact, some love and affection. He said he knew he was going to die, but he was lonely. For an instant I felt repulsed, then I knelt and placed his head in my lap and held his hand. This grip was the answer. I had given him what he needed. The episode was short, but I remember the compassion I felt for him, and the anger at this needless waste of life. Shortly thereafter he died; the ambulance came and took him away. Up to that time I didn't think it possible to become personally involved in this manner or situation. I don't know if I could again. It is hard to say.

Such episodes transcend typical patterns of response to become more open, honest, and fulfilling: in some way, superior.

Method

Subjects

Groups of subjects. Respondents comprised 30 members in each of four groups: introductory psychology classes, college creative arts

classes, adult education, and counselor education. These discrete groups were selected to avoid homogeneity yet provide a setting conducive to a paper-and-pencil task lasting from 45 to 60 minutes. The 45 men and 75 women ranged from 16 to 65 years in age.

Types of peak performance. Two raters independently examined 120 narratives and identified the following types of peak performance: personal-interpersonal (14), aesthetic (28), death crisis (20), intellectual (21), sport (20), and miscellaneous (17). Age range of the 9 women and 5 men who reported personal-interpersonal events was 17 to 35 years, with a median age of 22.5.

Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of (a) an open question asking for a narrative description of a personal peak performance, (b) 74 items with a 5-point scale from slightly important to extremely important to the described peak performance, (c) an open question asking for a brief description of average behavior in the same type of activity, and (d) the same rating scale as in (b) applied to the average behavior.

The questionnaire was developed from content analyses of narratives of personal peak performance written by graduate students in counselor education, who are relatively sophisticated in observing and reporting subjective experiences, and supplemented with related descriptions from humanistic literature (Privette & Landsman, 1983). Item reliability on test-retest administrations (n = 39) ranged from .30 to .86 (median = .66). Items are shown in abbreviated form in Table 1.

Procedures

Collection of data. The questionnaire was administered without prior explanation of peak performance to members of 4 discrete groups. Each participant provided both narrative and quantitative data for a personal incident of peak performance and a parallel average event.

Data were screened before analyses for technical errors and to evaluate the pertinence of each data set to the study. Narrative descriptions of peak performance were independently evaluated by two trained judges on the following criteria: (a) the respondent describes personal performance that exceeds that person's average behavior, (b) the incident is believable as a peak performance, and (c) the incident is described fully and clearly enough to be assessed. Although it was not assumed that disqualified narratives were not peak performance, only those that met the criteria were retained for further study. The judges rate of agreement = .77.

Analysis of data. Difference scores (peak minus average) were obtained for each item to minimize inter-item discrepancies that might not be germane to the question and to indicate the relative strength of variables in differentiating peak from average functioning. For this exploratory examination, factor analysis with an orthogonal solution was chosen. To reduce variables without losing significant content, all factors with latent roots = 1.0 were retained.

Factor scores for each subject were computed, using the factor structure and a scoring coefficient matrix. In addition, two subsets of items were identified by two trained raters and included 13 items

expressing a strong sense of self and 9 related to other people. Using analysis of variance, differences were compared among the following: with Wilks Lambda criterion and canonical correlations (Privette, 1981) (a) peak and average performance scores, (b) peak scores of the 4 groups (psychology, creative arts, counselor education, and adult education), (c) peak scores of men and women, and (d) with Duncan's multiple-range test, peak factor and subset scores for the 6 types (personal-interpersonal, aesthetic, death crisis, intellectual, sport, and miscellaneous). Each subset was compared to its counterpart: self versus non-self and other people versus not others, by t tests.

Results

A tentative topology of peak interpersonal performance, based on the overall factor structure and the factor scores of respondents who reported personal incidents of interpersonal peak performance, is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Scores on peak performance were significantly different from scores on average functioning, F (1, 119) = 13.60, $p<.0001$. In general, differences on peak performance scores among groups and between men and women were not significant. Men scored higher than women on 3 factors: clear focus, closure, and spontaneity. The counselor education group scored higher than the adult education group on expression of self (Privette, 1981).

Comparisons of interpersonal with aesthetic, death crisis, intellectual, sports, and miscellaneous types indicated that although rank order of factors differed among types, significant differences were minor. the following two variations were noted:[1] (a) analysis of variance showed that global awareness ($F = 3.33$, $p<.01$) was rated higher for the personal-interpersonal type than for all other types (Duncan's test, $a = .05$); and (b) clarity of role by others ($F = 1.86$, $p<.11$) was rated higher for the personal-interpersonal type than the intellectual type (Duncan's test, $a = .05$). Self scores were higher than non-self scores, $t = 4.95$, $p<.0001$; other-people scores were lower than scores not related to other people, $t = 5.81$, $p<.0001$.

Discussion

The results suggest that peak performance is an independent experiential phenomenon, different from average behavior. This was supported by significant differences between levels of behavior in conjunction with relatively few differences between genders and among groups and types.

The tentative topology presented in the table comprises a response to the question: What were your inner processes when you were most effective interpersonally? Research participants describe their own moments of peak interpersonal performance as having profound personal significance (Factors 1 & 5 and inversely, because of their low scores, Factors 21 & 22). Perceptually, peak interpersonal performance is characterized by clear focus: a sense of urgency (Factors 3 & 14), personal intensity (Factor 11), loss of the sense of time and space

(Factor 8), and a global awareness (Factor 6) without concern for anything extraneous (Factor 25). One feels a strong sense of self (Subset 7 & Factor 11), relatively independent from interfering influences of other people (Subset 20, Factors 13, 15, 17, & 19, all of which have relatively low scores). A feeling of joy and fulfillment (Factors 2 & 4) is closely associated with a strong sense of power (Factors 4 & 10), but not omnipotence (Factor 24). With focus on a valued object and a strong sense of personal power, one behaves effortlessly, spontaneously (Factor 9).

Four aspects of this perceptual model of peak interpersonal performance suggest parallels in effective counseling relationships. First, clear focus on meaning and values, without the intrusion of anything extraneous, is essential to peak performance. The basic structure of counseling, including such aspects as uninterrupted privacy, encourages the therapist to focus clearly on the feelings and meanings experienced and expressed by the client. This quality of focusing on the client as an experiencing person, rather than responding in a routine way to a symptom or diagnosis, is a key to optimal counseling performance. Focusing, concentration through meditation or relaxation, accurate empathy, attending behavior, and active listening are all established techniques that, among other things, promote the clear focus of peak performance in counseling.

Second, a strong sense of self, not as omnipotent but as powerful and confident, appears critical to peak relationships. Rogers (1962) alluded to this sense of self in his discussion of the "as if qualitty

of empathy." More emphatically, Buber (1952) described the concept "inclusion," which is essential to the I-Thou relationship, as experiencing one's own feelings while also experiencing those of another. Self is not lost or merged.

In peak interpersonal performance, as in other types of optimal performance studied, respondents indicated that other people had relatively little influence on their performance level. Analysis of this finding, which was contrary to expectation, suggests that certain involvement with others, most notably striving for approval and competition, are relatively absent in peak performance. This tendency was consistent and strong enough to suggest that these kinds of involvement with others are major obstacles to any type of peak performance, including interpersonal ones. Losing the sense of the "as if quality" may be as detrimental as failing to grasp the other person's meaning.

A strong sense of self seems to free a counselor from distracting needs for reassurance, dominance, or over-identification. Peak-performance research supports the notion that attention to the personal growth of the therapist is directly related to counseling effectiveness.

Third, the counselor's clarity of focus on the client's value and meaning, along with a strong sense of self, seems to result in a spontaneous behavioral process. The behavior is not practiced or planned, but neither does spontaneity denigrate the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Instead, spontaneity implies the unrestricted

use of one's repertoire--previously acquired--of knowledge and skills. Focus on the client with a strong sense of self seems to establish a channel through which behavioral processes flow in an unrestricted, intended manner. The interpersonal flow has an analogue in a clearly channeled river. Therapeutic effort is neither bogged down nor diverted to tangential paths.

A fourth suggestion from the topology lies in the combination of power and joy. Respondents associated their own strength with a sense of fulfillment. This phenomenon is found consistently in many types of peak performance and offers a promising research perspective. It appears that power and joy may be synergistic, each magnifying the effect of the other. Maslow (1971) offers theoretical support that peak experience frequently results from peak performance, or excellence triggers ecstasy. Conversely, tentative research eveidence indicates that peak experience may facilitate, if not trigger, peak performance (Mogar, 1967). It is likely that the interrelation of peak experience and peak performance is reciprocal and significant (Privette, 1983). If this is true, among other implications, transpersonal education, which emphasizes states of consciousness such as peak experience, may have direct influence on counseling effectiveness.

References

Bergin, A., & Garfield, S. (Eds.). (1980). Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change. New York: Wiley.

Buber, M. (1952). I and thou. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Carkhuff, R. (1969). Helping and human relations. New York:

New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston.

Ivey, A., & Gluckstern, N. (1974). Basic attending skills: Participant manual. North Amherst, Mass: Microtraining Associates.

Maslow, A. (1954). Motivation and personality. New York: Harper & Row.

Maslow, A. (1971). The farther reaches of human nature. New York: Viking Press.

Mogar, R. (1967). Psychedelic (LSD) research: A critical review of methods and results. In J. Bugental (Ed.), Challenges of humanistic psychology. New York: McGraw Hill, pp. 135-146.

Privette, G. (1981). Dynamics of peak performance. Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 21(1), 56-67.

Privette, G. (1982a). Experiential correlates of peak intellectual performance. Psychological Reports, 51, 323-330.

Privette, G. (1982b). Peak performance in the death crisis. In C. Corr & R. Pacholski (Eds.), Death education and counseling: Priorities today and tomorrow. Arlington, Va: Forum for Death Education and Counseling.

Privette, G. (1982c). Peak performance in sports: A factorial topology. International Journal of Sport Psychology, 13(4), 242-249.

Privette, G. (1982d, September). Two topologies of peak performance: Correlates of a personality construct. The University of West Florida, No.8217, (NTIS No. PB 82-194481)

Privette, G. (1983) Peak experience, peak performance, and flow: A comparative analysis of positive human experiences. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45(6), 1361-1369.

Privette, G., & Landsman, T. (1983). Factor analysis of peak performance: The full use of potential. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44, 195-200.

Rogers, C. (1951). Client centered therapy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rogers, C. (1962). The interpersonal relationship: The core of guidance. Harvard Educational Review, 32, 416-429.

Rogers, C. (1977). Carl Rogers on personal power. New York: Delacorte Press.

Footnotes

[1]Supplementary data are on file with Microfiche Publications, P. O. Box 3513, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017. For Document NAPS-03977, remit $4.00 for fiche or $8.65 for photocopy.

Table 1

Topology of Peak Interpersonal Performance[a]

Factor Item	% Variance Loading	Factor M[b] Item M
1. Religiosity: Meaningfulness	2.6	1.5
sense of divinity, God	69	1.3
more real than usual reality	54	1.3
strength came from unusual source	44	2.4
event seemed a mission	43	1.1
2. Ineffable High: Peak Experience	2.3	1.4
words were not enough	77	1.8
feelings were alive	59	1.1
left with awe	47	1.0
3. Emergency	2.3	1.3
beginning was fearful	82	1.2
happened in crisis situation	70	1.5
4. Power and Joy	5.2	1.3
left with fulfillment	69	1.7
certain of rising above usual[c]	66	2.1
felt all-powerful joy	66	1.1
completeness, wholeness[c]	62	1.3
left clean, new	58	1.4

Table 1 continued

	above, outside self	51	1.4
	full of force[c]	49	1.2
	strength from unusual source	45	2.4
	certain I was right	42	.9
	nothing could destroy me[c]	40	1.0
	in the beginning, I doubted success	-55	.0
5.	Important Value	2.0	1.2
	involved important belief, value	76	1.2
6.	Global Awareness	1.9	1.2
	greater awareness of surroundings	77	1.3
	at home in the world	43	.9
	interested in activity before	-51	-1.1
7.	Sense of Self	--[c]	1.2
8.	Loss of Time and Space	2.0	1.1
	lost sense of time	77	1.1
	ordinary sense of things faded	66	1.1
9.	Unrestrained Spontaneity	2.9	1.1
	action just came out	78	1.1
	all of me was working together[c]	65	1.6
	thoughts, objects operated selves	45	.4
	experience its own reward	45	.6

Table 1 continued

10.	Transcending Outer Limits	1.75	1.0
	seemed to rise above outside limits[c]	61	1.9
	beginning, danger	-72	-.1
11.	Clearly Focused Self: Intensity	4.1	1.0
	normal desires faded	90	.4
	normal cares faded	84	1.0
	experience overwhelmed other senses	61	.9
	complete involvement of my whole being[c]	55	1.9
	detached from world, usual reality	46	.9
12.	Consistency	1.8	.9
	acts were consistent with inner self[c]	80	.7
	left with peace, serenity	39	1.5
13.	Interpersonal Response	2.3	.7
	another person asked something of me[d]	81	.1
	action in response to another[d]	66	1.2
	trusted/trusting person involved[d]	61	1.1
14.	Click: Functional Autonomy	2.1	.7
	event began in a flash	77	1.1
	things went right without effort	44	.8
15.	Awareness of Others	2.3	.7
	others were paying attention[d]	84	.8
	others gave a sense of well being[d]	69	.6

Table 1 continued

16. Depletion	2.05	.6
experience left me exhausted	75	.4
felt I was responsible[c]	55	1.1
experience left me tense	35	.4
17. Clarity of Role (by others)	2.0	.6
clear what needed to be done	72	1.1
no one else able or willing	60	1.0
beginning, others negative	-46	.4
18. Intent	3.8	.6
determined to do better than usual	86	.9
determined to put out effort	83	1.0
determined to win approval[d]	68	.3
strong motivation	48	.9
wanted to accomplish something different	45	.1
determined to do better than others[d]	43	-.8
19. Personal Understanding, Communication	2.4	.6
liked people in a general way[d]	75	.1
understood something important	60	.8
learned something about self[c]	42	.9
genuine communication with another[d]	40	.4
expression of self[c]	40	.9

Table 1 continued

20. Other People	--[d]	.4
21. Seriousness	1.8	.3
actions new, not repeating old	40	.6
feeling of playfulness	-83	.3
22. Pleasant, Easy Beginning	2.5	.2
beginning influenced by beauty	78	.8
fascinated by act	47	.6
after related thinking or physical activity	43	1.0
situation called out, demanded	-53	1.4
23. Impulsion Toward Closure	2.1	.2
must continue until finished	75	.7
deep down I had known I could[c]	55	.4
had to think for myself	-39	.9
24. Feeling of Omnipotence	1.5	-.2
felt I could do anything[c]	67	.6
environment was different	-60	.9
25. Extraneous Vivid	1.9	-.4
something unimportant was vivid	81	-.4

[a]Factor structure based on difference scores (peak - average), n = 120.

[b]Factor scores include only key items, n = 14.

[c]Rater-identified subset, sense of self.

[d]Rater-identified subset, other people.